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Collaborative Evolution: The context surrounding the formation and the effectiveness of a school partnership in a divided community in Northern Ireland.

Authors:

Dr Gavin Duffy: School of Education Queen's University Belfast*

Prof Tony Gallagher: School of Education Queen's University Belfast

Abstract

This paper examines an initiative promoting collaboration between schools located in a city setting in Northern Ireland which is broadly divided along ethnic and political lines. The schools involved, like the vast majority of schools in Northern Ireland, educate Protestant and Catholic children separately. This presents particular challenges for school collaboration as it implies the establishment of new, connected relationships in an education system which is historically and contemporaneously more characterised by division. Since 2007, the schools in this study have been involved in an education initiative which promotes cross sectoral shared learning in core areas of the curriculum with a view to promoting school improvement; the additional, indirect goal is also about improving community relations. However, over this period, the relationship between the institutions has deepened, leading schools to examine how they can sustain partnership and evolve collaborative practice. This paper explores how the partnership has evolved and assesses its effectiveness as a collaborative enterprise. The paper concludes by demonstrating how effective collaboration between schools in Northern Ireland mitigates the potentially negative impacts of educating children separately, but also how effective models of school collaboration are capable of providing enhanced learning opportunities for pupils and are also capable of developing the communities in which they are located.

Keywords: School collaboration, shared education, collaborative effectiveness

*For Correspondence: Dr Gavin Duffy, School of Education, Queen's University Belfast, 20 College Green Belfast. BT7 1LN Tel: 028 9097 5260 g.duffy@qub.ac.uk

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Dr Gavin Duffy is a Research Fellow at the School of Education at Queen's University Belfast. Research interests include school collaboration and shared education, custodial education and educational disengagement.

Tony Gallagher is a Professor of Education at Queen's University and Pro-Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for academic planning, staffing and external affairs. He was head of the School of Education between 2005 and 2010. His main research interest is in the role of education in divided societies.

Introduction

Collaborative activity between schools is frequently promoted in the literature as activity which is beneficial for schools. Much of this literature focuses on how collaboration can improve schools particularly in the areas of pupil attainment, engagement and performance (Chapman et al. 2009; Chapman et al 2011; Hadfield et al. 2006; CUREE, 2005; Hadfield and Chapman, 2009); on how collaboration impacts upon school leadership (Ofsted, 2011; Hargreaves, 2010; Kubiak and Bertram 2010; Chapman et al. 2008; Hadfield and Joplin 2012); and on teacher development, performance and motivation (Hadfield et al. 2006; Harris and Jones, 2010; Chapman, 2008; Ofsted, 2011) (Muijs, et al. 2010; Chapman et al. 2009; Hadfield and Jopling, 2012; Ainscow et al. 2006). School collaboration and networking is also promoted as a strategy for offering wider curricular choice, and broadening opportunity in order to meet the diverse needs of pupils (Pring, 2009; Muijs et al. 2010). Others demonstrated benefits of collaboration and networking include: motivating disengaged and at risk students (Hadfield et al. 2006); helping schools cope with challenging circumstances (Ainscow et al. 2006); combatting negative effects of competition (Hodgson and Spours, 2006; Ainscow and West, 2006); and helping schools make more effective use of resources by providing economies of scale.

The context of school collaboration in a divided society

Collaboration between schools is situated and needs to address contextual challenges. This is particularly so in divided societies like Northern Ireland, when the collaboration seeks to cross those ethnic institutional barriers. Collaboration and partnership between schools in Northern Ireland takes place amid the complexity of an education system that is predicated on an historical commitment to denominationalism, which in itself is reinforced by political division. As a consequence of denominational school sectors, Protestant and Catholic children are largely educated separately. Over 90% of pupils are educated with their denominational peers, while a small integrated school sector, which emerged in 1981, represents fewer than 7% of all pupils (DENI, 2013). A number of commentators (Gallagher, 2004 & 2005; Hayes and McAllister, 2009) have argued that education has now taken a prominent position as a core component in the reconstruction of post-conflict society as well as underpinning economic stability and reconciliation. This context then has a profound effect on how schools from different sectors have contact and collaborate.

Broadly there have been three strands of educational initiatives which have been designed to address the impact of separate education in Northern Ireland, these include: (i) contact programmes, (including: Education for Mutual Understanding [EMU], Cultural Heritage and the Cross Community Contact Scheme) (ii) curricular initiatives, (including the introduction of local and global citizenship and common history and religious curriculum) and as previously mentioned (iii) attempts to create an entirely new sector based on religiously integrated schools. Research, however has demonstrated that these initiatives have had limited systemic impact, (Gallagher, 2004; Arlow, 2004; Smith and Robinson, 1996).

More recently a number of government initiatives have emerged which encourage schools to work collaboratively. An 'entitlement curriculum' has been put in place which requires schools to provide a minimum number of subject choices for GCSE and GCE pupils: an intention of this initiative was to encourage greater local collaboration between schools and Further Education Colleges in providing this wider curriculum range. In addition, Area Learning Communities were established and supported by Local Authorities to promote local cooperation.

A major initiative provided outside of the Department of Education is the Sharing Education Programme [SEP]. This initiative promotes sharing and collaboration between schools, where pupils from different schools can learn together and where schools and teachers can share resources and expertise with the aim of developing sustainable institutional relationships. A core element of SEP involves creating cross-sector collaborative networks of schools which offer shared learning experiences for pupils in core curricular areas. In doing so, SEP is committed to enhancing pupils' educational opportunities, but also demonstrating how resources between schools can be shared and used more effectively. There are also opportunities to address denominational and cultural differences which will emerge implicitly from the relationships that pupils and staff develop through shared learning. SEP has been supported by funding from two international funding bodies and in addition has secured funding for a series of parallel research and advocacy activities.

There have been two phases of the programme, from 2007 to 2010 [SEP1] and from 2010 to 2013 [SEP2]. SEP1 involved 12 partnerships comprising 65 primary and post-primary schools. By the third year of SEP1 almost 3,500 pupils were involved in a little under 3,000 routine shared classes. SEP2 involves 12 partnerships made up of 72 primary and post-primary schools. After one year of SEP2, over 5,000 pupils have engaged in over 3,000 shared classes, (Gallagher et al. 2010).

The aim of this paper is to explore the context of an additional cross-sectoral collaborative partnership between schools which emerged from the Sharing Education Programme. Involved in the study are participants who teach or are school leaders from two maintained post primary schools and one controlled post primary school. The context in which the collaborative partnership is located is important, as the schools operate in what is termed a contested space – a city setting where as a consequence of a distinct historical and political legacy, the community has become effectively divided. This study collects data at an important time whereby schools previously involved in the Sharing Education Programme have sought to create a new partnership. This paper outlines how the schools collaborate given this complicated context.

Constructivism and social learning as a framework to consider collaboration between schools

Muijs et al. (2010) argue that collaboration in an educational context requires more theoretical attention; theoretical perspectives tend to be borrowed from fields outside of education, namely business, psychology and sociology. Muijs et al. (2010; 2011) present four theoretical perspectives which they argue collectively form an over-lapping umbrella term, which they describe as network theory which comprises of: *constructivist organisational theory*; *social capital theory*; *new social movements*; and *Durkheimian network theory*. Muijs et al. (2011: 23) comment that the 'constructivist and social capital perspectives appear to describe quite a lot of educational networking activity, such as the creation of shared learning and teaching approaches and the development of joint curricular offerings.' They also argue that both perspectives along with social network theories are best used to describe localised views of networks and collaboration, as opposed to the Durkheimian model which best describes the collaboration from a societal standpoint (Muijs et al. 2011).

This paper looks at the first of the perspectives suggested by Muijs et al. (2010) and thus locates school collaboration within social constructivism, more specifically social learning theory

(Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1983; Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1997) and considers the applicability that learning, meaning and knowledge formation is socially constructed; that learning is neither an individual activity nor a passive process, (Pritchard & Woolard, 2010) and that this perspective is a useful framework to consider collaboration between schools. From a Vygotskian (1978) perspective, learning is a social activity which occurs as a consequence of an interactive process between individuals. Vygotsky proposes that learning takes place by building and adapting or ‘scaffolding’ (Wood et al, 1976: 90) learning from the competencies of more knowledgeable others. This is the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky uses the notional idea of zones where learners progress on to the next zone of development which is just beyond their own current level of understanding (Pritchard and Woolard, 2010) and this occurs as a consequence of social interaction and collaboration with ‘more capable peers’ (Vygotsky, 1978: 86). Applied to collaboration, implies that schools can learn from each other’s good practice. This may be particularly relevant for schools facing challenging circumstances (Ainscow et al. 2006) where they collaborate with a specialist school or one with a proven track record in a particular subject area. This also fits well with the social capital model (Hargreaves, 2004; Muijs et al. 2011).

The above describes a constructivist perspective on individual learning. The challenge lies in applying and up-scaling this theoretical concept to organisations and promoting effective inter-organisation learning. However when talking about how organisations learn it may not be the case that organisations learn as though possessing a collective intelligence or having anthropomorphic traits (Kim, 2004), instead organisations are made up individuals who learn as a consequence of interactive social activity and they, in turn, impact upon the structures of organisations. We can apply elements of constructivism and use it to think about how organisations learn, both within and between institutions. According to Kim (2004):

‘We can think of organisational learning as a metaphor derived from our understanding of individual learning. In fact organisations ultimately learn via their individual members. Hence, theories of individual learning are crucial for understanding organisational learning.’ (Kim, 2004: 29)

To create knowledge those in collaboration, within and between organisations, need to create environs and opportunity where knowledge can be shared. Krogh et al. (2006) discuss a number of conditions needed to create shared knowledge: creating enabling contexts or environments, which can be physical or even virtual; where tacit knowledge can be converted into explicit knowledge and establishing ‘micro-communities of knowledge’ characterised by shared interests and made up of individuals either within or between organisations. Given these conditions, Harris (2008), suggests that such groups will, overtime, become more coherent and create sets of behaviours and practices which allow them to solve problems and generate ideas, (2008: 131). According to Harris (2008):

‘As knowledge moves from an individual to an organisation in the form of teams, groups and networks, it can provide the shared context in which meaning of objects, problems, events and artefacts are constructed and negotiated. This view accords with knowledge based constructivism where social networks, trustful relationships and collaboration promote the co-construction of knowledge and practices’ (Harris, 2008: 132)

Given the caveat above, this paper describes how organisations (schools) learn from, and collaborate with, other organisations. Muijs et al. (2011: 19) and others (Santaro et al. 2006; Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Boreham, 2004) demonstrated how organisations can be thought of as ‘sense making systems’ creating shared perceptions and

interpretations of reality', furthermore as a way of avoiding organisational myopia, organisations, in this case schools, can collaborate in order to create new and shared knowledge and broaden perspective. Effective collaboration or 'deep collaboration' as opposed to 'functional collaboration' takes place when members of a partnership must engage with one another beyond 'coordinating, consulting, communicating and cooperating' and instead must develop 'collective understanding' and 'create shared knowledge' (Head, 2003: 50-51). Muijs et al. (2011) also comments that shared knowledge is acquired through action and interaction with the environment and others and organisations are most likely to become effective learners when:

They form communities of practice in networks or other collaborative arrangements and are engaged in a process of social learning that occurs when actors who have a common interest in some subject or problem collaborate to share ideas, find solutions, and build innovations. (Muijs et al, 2011: 20)

Boreham (2000: 6) refers to the notion of shared knowledge as a group/organisation achieving or demonstrating 'collective competence.' Applying the tenets of Activity theory based specifically on the work of Engestrom (1987) and Leont'ev (1978), Boreham (2004: 9) argues that effective group based work must require: 'making collective sense of events in the workplace, developing and using a collective knowledge base and developing a sense of interdependency.'

Furthermore, Wenger's concept of communities of practice (1998) is particularly useful in understanding how organisations develop their own internal learning and then extend this by learning from one another. Wenger (2000) views learning as a social process in which learning occurs when we align ourselves with the competencies and experiences of others. Wenger (2000: 226) proposes that organisations are themselves social learning systems and that learning is:

defined as the interplay between social competence and personal experience and is a dynamic two way relationship between people and the social learning systems in which they participate. It combines personal transformation with evolution of social structures (Wenger, 2000: 227)

How Wenger defines a community of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2000; Wenger, 2011) has distinct resonance with the way in which schools in this study interact and collaborate. For example, Wenger utilises three features: *domain*, *community* and *practice* (Wenger 2011). Domain is defined as identity derived from a shared or collective interest and competencies; commitment to the domain, and developing and valuing shared competencies distinguishes a group from others. Community is defined as a domain engaged in joint activities, discussions, helping one another, relationship building and sharing information. Practice is defined as a 'shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice,' (Wenger, 2011: 2). Based on these criteria, the school partnership in this study can aptly be described as a community of practice. This community of practice has formed as a consequence of schools and individuals within schools (teachers and school managers) collaborating over time. The following sections will present data which explore how the schools collaborate and allow us to assess the effectiveness of the partnership.

Methodology

The study was qualitative in design and data collection took place in the spring and summer months of 2011. The remit of the study focused on understanding the local context and

motivations surrounding the emergence of and formation of a new school partnership and assessing if it represented an effective or strong model of collaboration, or demonstrated potential to be an effective model of collaboration. The study focused on three post primary schools. Five other primary schools joined the partnership at a later date, after data collection had been completed in late June 2011. All 8 schools are the focus of a current study being undertaken by the authors (2012-2014). The methodological approach involved three phases: data collection, a literature review and thematic coding and data analysis. Firstly, ethnographic observations of partnership planning meetings took place. These meetings, held within the schools were intended to establish the remit and functions of the new partnership. Each of these meetings involved senior members of staff, mostly at the vice principal level, members of staff at teacher level who had been involved in the co-ordination of SEP1 activities and a representative of the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI) who had been invited to join the planning team to act as a point of consultation. The duration of each meeting was usually between two and three hours and there were five meetings between March and June 2011. Each planning meeting was recorded, a transcription was produced and observation notes were made. Data were also collected through semi-structured interviews with education managers and teachers involved in the partnership. Each interview lasted an hour or longer. In total, three vice principals from each school accompanied by three teachers, who had previously been co-ordinators of SEP1 partnerships, were interviewed. The following themes were explored with participants at interview:

1. Evidence of sustained collaboration post SEP funding
2. Community relations benefits
3. History and dynamics of shared and collaborative activity
4. Benefits of SEP for whole school
5. Logistics and challenges of collaboration
6. Benefits of SEP for students
7. Motivations to collaborate
8. Willingness to sustain collaborative activity post SEP
9. Good/best Practice
10. Conditions required to maintain collaboration post SEP
11. Benefits of SEP for staff
12. Staff relationships
13. Context and challenges of collaborating in contested space
14. Needs of pupils
15. Impact of collaboration other than community relations

The themes above emerged from a review of literature which focused on the recent context of inter-school collaboration in Northern Ireland (Donnelly and Gallagher, 2008; Knox, 2010; Atkinson et al. 2007) and more specifically literature on effective collaboration in an educational context. Key texts in this review included Hodgson and Spours, (2006); Higham and Yeomans, (2009); Atkinson et al. (2007); Woods et al. (2006); Head, (2003). Woods et al. (2006: p59) for example, outline seven points used to measure the extent of collaboration between institutions. These measurements include the degree to which collaborative partnerships have: strategic vision; group/area identity; organisational infrastructure; professional collaborative activity; activities which penetrate below senior management; innovated to seek significant transformation; and normalised collaboration as part of the school's culture. Partnerships that can evidence all or most of the criteria are likely to be described as deep or strong collaborations (Head 2003). Effective or strong models according to Hodgson and Spours (2006: p333) are those that have the following four dimensions: 'vision,

purpose and underpinning principles’, ‘professionalism, pedagogy and leadership’, ‘planning, organisation and governance in a local area’, and those that also take into account ‘physical learning environments and communication systems.’

The final methodological phase involved coding the data, initially using the thematic areas explored during participant interviews. Then we devised an analytical toolkit using the above measurements suggested in particular by Woods et al. (2006) and undertook a second level analysis of the thematic data. These themes are outlined in more detail in the discussion section.

The schools involved in the study

Prior to formation of the Contested Space Partnership, all three of the post-primary schools were involved in collaborative activity through the first cohort of Sharing Education Programme between 2007 and 2010 and as a consequence, the Contested Space Partnership has evolved out of the first cohort of SEP. So the schools involved did not enter into partnership ab initio. Each of the maintained schools has had different and distinct partnership arrangements with the controlled school during SEP1, and additionally all three schools would have had various partnership arrangements through their membership of the same Area Learning Community. *Table 1* provides a brief description of the schools involved in the study.

Insert Table 1 here (see end of document)

Partnership activity prior to the Contested Space Programme between School 1 and School 2 involved: shared lessons on Learning for Life and Work and Citizenship at Key Stage 3; a Year 10 summer science school; shared parent evenings and a shared Parent and Teacher Association. Both schools had been involved in collaborative activity for four years prior to the new partnership arrangements.

Partnership activity prior to the Contested Space Programme between School 2 and School 3 involved: shared dance, drama and music classes for post-16 pupils; Diploma in Health and Social Care; pupils and a shared history project involving a visit to a WW1 museum in Europe with the aim of looking at the impact of conflict and remembrance through History. Other sharing activity involved post-16 pupils working together in a Young Leaders Programme and a Mentoring Scheme. Both schools had been involved in collaborative activity for three years prior to the new partnership arrangements.

Findings

Formation of the Contested Space Programme

The Contested Space Partnership emerged from two smaller partnerships that had operated during the first phase of SEP (2007-2010). These prior partnerships involved two Catholic post primary schools working separately with a Protestant post primary school on different curriculum areas. For the Contested Spaces Partnership all three schools came together in a unitary partnership and developed a new unitary governance and organisational structure.

In the new partnership the schools opted to design a programme that addressed social need in an area of high deprivation by designing a common curricular programme which reflected the local context in which the schools were located. Senior staff and teachers from all three schools engaged in a series of discussions between March and June 2011 and by consensus agreed that they should form a single partnership centred around tackling social disadvantage and addressing need through a shared learning programme for pupils at Key Stage 3 that was located within the Learning for Life and Work and Citizenship element of the NI curriculum. The schools also agreed to form a new governance structure and set about creating a steering group to oversee the workings of the partnership. At the time of writing, there were 153 pupils involved in the project and a teacher from each school who co-ordinated shared learning activities. As with previous SEP 1 arrangements, in order to maintain the benefits of cross-sectoral shared learning, pupils (years 8 and 9) from schools 1 and 2 and schools 2 and 3 (year 8) continued to visit each other schools for classes on a weekly basis. Pupils from schools 1 and 3 did not engage in shared lessons as both schools were maintained but collaborative arrangements involving teachers and senior staff between all three schools forged a partnership. Teachers from each school meet each week to plan together and share resources. These planning meetings are rotated between the three schools and will be discussed in more detail later in the paper. An additional feature of this partnership was that five primary schools became involved in the programme, although they had not got involved during the period of data collection for this paper. Further data-collection and analysis is on-going on the new wider partnership activities

The partnership was supported with funding from the Interface/Contested Space Programme offered by the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister [OFMDFM] and Atlantic Philanthropies [AP].

Contested Space: How local context impacts and defines collaborative activity

According to Howes and Ainscow (2006: 105) ‘much of the literature on collaboration underplays the significance of local context.’ As a response, what follows provides insight into the local context surrounding a school partnership. We begin with a discussion of what constitutes ‘contested space’ and the way this impacts on schools, yet connects them to the community. This is followed by a discussion around the needs of young people and the challenges they face growing up in a divided city. The paper then explores how schools working in partnership attempt to address these challenges.

Contested spaces (Morrissey & Gaffikin, 2006; Leonard, 2006) are usually characterised by different communities or populations, defined on the basis of ethnic, religious, political or cultural practices, living within the same space (such as a village, town or city), but separate and in an antagonistic relationship. The manifestation of this can be seen through various examples, including the demarcation of space through the use of flags, colours, marches or murals, all of which have the effect of ‘marking’ space as ‘belonging’ to one community, over another; giving way to a pattern of increased residential separation in NI, brutally reflected in the number of ‘peace walls’ which divide communities in cities. In Belfast, for example, there are more peace walls dividing communities in 2013 than there were in 1994 when the paramilitary groups officially declared ceasefires and the end of hostilities.

The city in which the case study partnership is located has, historically, been one of the most contested spaces in Northern Ireland. This pattern of separation has arisen as a consequence of long historical patterns of settlement, manipulation of public housing for electoral benefit, and

the more recent legacy of political violence and the perceived need for security by being 'with your own'. This division is also compounded by the natural geography of the area, as the city is divided by a river and the community separation has come, more and more, to involve each community settling on one side of this physical barrier. Protestants have always been a numerical minority in the city and in the 1970's, as a direct consequence of the 'Troubles', most of them either left the city altogether, or relocated on one side of the river. In this way the ethnic or religious character of each side of the city became more pronounced.

The Population Change and Social Inclusion Study published by the OFMDFM, (Shirlow et al. 2005) estimates that approximately three quarters of the population of the city is Catholic and a keen sense of alienation felt by the Protestant minority remains. There remains much evidence of sectarianism and fragmented community relations in this area. For example, police statistics (PSNI, 2010) on sectarian incidents, detections and recorded crimes showed a 179 per cent increase between 2008/9 and 2009/10, making this the area with the highest level of increase in Northern Ireland.

Some of the consequences of living in contested space may mean that there is reluctance to connect with other communities or groups that do not share the same cultural or religious background. There may also be a reluctance to travel to other communities or move through contested spaces. This is borne out in an ethnographic study (Roche, 2009) based on the city, which explored community relations and sectarianism among 16-35 year olds. Roche (2009) introduces the term 'bounded contentment' to describe a resulting scenario whereby individuals are essentially limited in their exposure to the other community. As a consequence, young people from different community backgrounds had limited contact with one another; they developed fears about going into 'other community' areas and, as a consequence, movement within and across the contested space became limited, a process which only increases inter-community isolation.

The context of living in contested space and ramifications of 'bounded contentment' were frequently evidenced in interviews with participants by the way in which they labelled and distinguished parts of the city from one another. They frequently referred to areas such as the 'Waterside' (mixed area but where the vast majority of Protestants live), the 'City side' (majority Catholic), and the 'Bogside' (majority Catholic), as well as making numerous references to the bridges and the way in which the river divides the city. Teachers and educational managers in schools highlighted that it was common for parents from the other side of the community never to have visited their school or the area within which their school was located, despite living only a few miles away. One consequence of this is highlighted by participants who felt that parents living on the mainly Protestant/Loyalist Waterside were very reluctant to send children to the Nationalist/Catholic side of the city of avail of post 16 education and instead opted to send them to schools and Further Education colleges in neighbouring towns further away from home rather than 'cross over the bridge' to use facilities and services much closer by:

We have a river that acts like a natural barrier between two sides. That sounds terrible but to the extent that children if they choose to go on to further education, they will go to the college in Limavady or the college in Strabane, rather than cross over the bridge. We also entered into the Foyle Learning Community, where schools were encouraging their students to access courses, post 16 that were available in other schools. I suppose every school was struggling to encourage their children to do that, they are very much home-birds who like to stay with their own school. But there was very little cross over between controlled and maintained and then of course you had the bridge because they had to go across the bridge, which was a no-no.

Despite this background, those in the study described the experience of participation in collaborative engagement with schools from other sectors as having a positive impact. They pointed, in particular, to regular movement of pupils and parents into the ‘other’s’ schools and communities, and a sense, over time, of the process of regular and sustained sharing becoming normalised:

Our children would say you cannot go through the Bogside. You cannot go through the Bogside. And we went every other week and then it just became normal. We took children into a Catholic school with the statue of Mary at the door and the roof did not fall in on them. It just became normal. We took their parents into the [Catholic area] for meetings, when we arranged their trips. It is really simplistic and sounds really daft but it is parents who would have never ever have been past the city walls and yet drove into the [Catholic area] for meetings about their children and the same for parents from [Catholic area], who wouldn’t have been to the Waterside apart from going to the hospital. We were always on this side so it wasn’t the same as taking them up into [street name]. I always think that it was amazing that the parents went into the [Catholic area] for meetings considering the prejudice I had experienced from people, oh you don’t go near the Bogside.

Teacher School 2

The following school manager argues that shared learning should not be about grand gestures involving metaphors of crossing bridges and rivers, but rather it should about normalising the experience of contact between pupils from different communities so that the positive experience of sharing and learning about the other, permeates the home and thus each other’s communities:

But even going home and saying to your mummy and daddy I was over at [school name] today and do you know what I heard or they are doing such and such or were planning this. Is that not what it’s about? It is kind of normalising day to day life and carrying wee tales from one to the other, good or bad. To me that’s where it starts, it’s not about the grand or opening the new bridge, that’s wonderful too and we need all of that too, but I think it is just the normalisation of it.

Education Manager

Staff frequently referenced in interview, how it was becoming common or normal to see different students with different uniforms walking around each other’s schools. Participants described how over time and through regular contact, students got used to the idea of visiting each other’s schools, and hoped that the community and parents would similarly become more accustomed to pupils moving through contested space and engaging with one another in shared classes.

Identifying common purpose: Addressing need through collaboration

A key element of the OFMDFM/AP Interface/Contested Spaces (2010) programme was to focus activities on areas of social need, which is measured in Northern Ireland by the Noble Indices (NISRA, 2010). Accordingly the schools involved in this study were located in socially

disadvantaged communities and they decided to address issues pertinent to this as part of the core collaborative activity.

Staff argued in planning meetings in the months leading up to the submission of a funding application to the Interface/Contested Spaces Programme that the years they had spent collaborating, through the various SEP 1 partnerships had enabled the schools to develop strong institutional relationships. This in turn made the process of discussing and identifying the needs of the schools and the motivations for collaboration much easier as trust had developed between the schools. Participants argued that the experience of collaboration provided a collegial relationship where schools could talk openly about the problems and challenges they faced and thus allowed schools to recognise that despite their sectoral differences and distinct ethos, the schools faced similar challenges. As a consequence the out-workings of the partnership became focused on addressing common need and devising a shared approach:

We don't easily in the company of other schools say that we are having a difficulty. It shows the confidence that we have as a partnership to be able to admit those things to each other. [...] It was a great sense of relief to realise that it wasn't an internal thing it was a societal thing and not a school issue.

Education Manager School 1

During planning meetings schools agreed that the focus and motivation for collaboration, should be constructed around addressing the following common need themes:

1. The negative impacts of substance misuse on young people particularly from alcohol, drugs and cigarettes
2. Encouraging young people to remain sexually healthy and resilient, and helping them understand more about sexuality and challenging homophobia in schools
3. The impact of and appropriate use of the internet, various social media (such as Facebook) and mobile phones
4. Improving community relations, encouraging more movement across contested space, identifying shared space and challenging sectarianism
5. Anti-social behaviour and criminality

While participants were keen to address those challenges that arise from the legacy of violence and political conflict, there was also appetite to address other social themes. According to the Education Manager in School 3, a range of children's needs have been 'masked by the conflict'. The over-riding focus of social policy had been on improving community relations and counterbalancing the impact of ethnic conflict. Currently this focus has adjusted, to some degree, to take account of the needs of children and young people growing up in a modern city. One educational manager described the issue of social need as the 'new troubles':

I think city centre schools are facing huge issues which are not just political anymore; it's very much what we would refer to as the 'new troubles' out there. I have had to face in this my ninth year, more challenging problems of a social, child protection side than I have ever had to before and that is the case of any society coming out of conflict.

Participants in planning meetings and interviews frequently talked about the negative impact of substance misuse and anti-social behaviour. As a consequence, they invited a representative from the Police Service of Northern Ireland [PSNI] Community Safety Branch based in the city to join the steering group and act as a point of guidance on these issues. The PSNI representative was able to corroborate these concerns that substance misuse and anti-social behaviour were prevalent amongst young people. The PSNI representative provided to the partnership unpublished data revealing that between January and Dec 2010 the PSNI recorded 163 incidences involving alcohol and drug use by young people. Of these 163 incidences, 11 were deemed to be offence related, while 152 were not. Boys were much more likely to come to the attention of the PSNI than girls, with boys involved in 99 incidences and girls involved in 62 incidents. The modal age category for alcohol and drugs related incidences were sixteen year olds. The PSNI also provided ward level data via the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS) on the number of detectable offences and level of anti-social incidences. In the areas covered by this study, incidences of anti-social behaviour had decreased between 2010 and 2011, but incidences of street drinking had increased by almost threefold (PSNI, 2011). The Area Constituency Report published by the NI Assembly (NINIS, 2010) indicates that overall this area has witnessed a higher rate of crime, violent crime and anti-social behaviour orders in comparison with other parts of Northern Ireland.

The PSNI representative commented that street drinking was a significant concern and that young people were drinking at an early age:

Quite a lot of the young people are drinking, some aren't. My belief is that within these groups there are 11 and 12 year olds watching what's going on and they are next. We have started to deliver lessons to P7 children around the topic of health. I do feel that the time is coming when we are going to be bringing primary school kids home to their parents on a Friday and Saturday night. We would have traditionally worried about our sixth and fifth years [16-17] - the older ages, in terms of what they have become involved in. Now, that has gone big time down. They are now very young, it is first years [11-12] and second years and a lot of third years.

PSNI Representative

The Contested Space Partnership was also in agreement that young people's sexual health, sexuality and resilience was another important area that could be addressed. In the local health and social services area in 2008 there were 224 births to teenage mothers, with half of these born to mothers from the city (FPA 2010). The Foyle Constituency Report from the NI Assembly (NINIS, 2010) indicates that this area of Northern Ireland has the 5th highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Northern Ireland. A teacher at interview commented:

I have been teaching for 23 years in the Waterside area and I can see a massive change in terms of the whole idea of values and we get into an area which is very contentious, which is moral values. Their school typically maintains values and this school has very proud values and many schools do. All of these are being kicked out of touch now. How we deal with them in citizenship, when there is a boy or girl in the class who has come out as gay and how that young person is maintained in the class or in the school without other young people bullying them. So those are real issues. We have got to look after the kids in our school who are homosexual.

Education Manager: School 2

Lastly, schools were concerned about pupil's on-line safety and inappropriate use of social media

. Networking sites such Facebook are widely used by pupils in the post primary schools. Staff felt that it was important that pupils used such media appropriately and that they remain safe online. A member of staff responsible for coordinating SEP1 activity in one of the schools explained that teachers were aware that sites such as Facebook were being used to advertise and organise weekend activity. Another member of the partnership indicated that Facebook was being used by students to gather together large groups on weekends, and that there were indications that the site was being used to encourage and glorify anti-social activity in the city. Other staff had concerns that parents could not always monitor how Facebook was being used.

A collaborative approach to addressing young people's needs

The programme devised by the Contested Space Partnership sought to address these issues in a context overlaid by a legacy of political violence. This programme had three aspects: first, a curricular element based on KS3 Learning for Life and Work and Citizenship; second, a process whereby schools further developed their institutional relationships by aligning school policies across the partnership; and third, making stronger links between schools and the communities in which they reside, with the aim of utilising community based expertise in the classroom and helping to build teacher capacity to deliver themes which are evidently challenging or potentially contentious.

Translating local context into the curriculum

The partnership agreed that a shared learning approach based on the five need areas should focus on pupils in Key Stage 3 (approximately aged 11-13 years old). According to teachers and senior leaders in the study, young people at this age were most at risk from the pressures of illicit substances or the inappropriate use of social media, and most likely to exhibit anti-social behaviours. Targeting a shared education programme at this age group meant that schools had an opportunity to build awareness among pupils and promote pro-social lifestyles. The partnership argued that the need themes corresponded well with the existing curriculum, particularly in the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) aspect of the curriculum at primary level and Learning for Life and Work (LLW) at post primary level.

Drawing on the lessons learned from schools collaborating during the first cohort of SEP, (see Duffy and Gallagher, 2012) a number of teachers and managers agreed that shared lessons between pupils must be embedded into school timetables, rather than being cast as something that was an add-on, or extra-curricular activity. Building shared lessons into the normal school day by adapting the existing curriculum to address need would help legitimise the proposed common approach in schools. Locating the programme within the LLW and PDMU curriculum provided curricular status. Furthermore, locating this programme within existing curriculum provides schools with an opportunity to adapt and apply the curriculum to an actual, localised as opposed to academic context, thus allowing pupils to examine, for example, anti-social behaviour, within the context of the city where they are growing up. Additionally, using a subject such as Learning for Life and Work allowed the schools to adapt a common aspect of the curriculum with which each were familiar in terms of curricular requirements and available resources:

When we got together and we had the option to expand the partnership as it currently is by bringing in other schools and expanding the primary school partnership as well. We have never

ever wanted it to be something that was put onto us. We didn't want it to be an add-on. We wanted it to be something that was needed in our schools and was of value. We still knew that the best vehicle for that was through LLW programme. It is common it is PDMU in the primary schools; it is a common theme that goes through the primary school into the secondary schools.

Education Manager: School 1

Harnessing community expertise to help build teacher capacity

There was recognition within the partnership that teachers involved in delivering shared classes would be expected to address a variety of contentious themes, based on the five need areas. According to a school manager, locating the need themes within the existing curriculum goes some way to legitimising the common approach for teachers:

They trust, because it is curricular, because it is part of the curriculum and because it is very much teacher led. We didn't hype it in any way we just wanted it to be seen as the way we do things, this is the way things are delivered.

Manager: School 1

A strategy to help build the capacity of teachers to talk to pupils about the need areas in shared classrooms involves schools developing strong links with community, voluntary and statutory agencies. Members in the partnership agreed that schools should avail of the skills-base and expertise that already exists in the community and in particular make links with those groups who have a vested interest in the relevant need areas identified by the partnership. The education manager at School 3 proposed 'finding what was good in the community' and 'bringing it into schools' with the aim of developing teacher capacity and assisting in the delivery of lessons and programmes relevant to the need areas identified by the partnership:

The timing is fantastic, contested space has come along at a time when schools are going ok we are facing a different situation here. We need staff to be up-skilled here, we need the curriculum to be different; we need the community coming in. We need the support of all those experts and this is about to be formalised in a way but it could have taken a long time to do.

Education Manager: School 3

School managers suggested that the community sector had an important role to play in building staff capacity to enable them confidently to deliver many of the controversial aspects of the proposed shared education project. The education manager at School 3 argued that there was a 'huge skills gap for staff' themselves in relation to the identified need areas. As an example of this activity members of the PSNI Community Safety Branch in the city had met a number of times with the post primary teachers to plan out a programme of events whereby the police would provide staff training, share resources and deliver a programme in classrooms on internet safety and substance misuse with a particular focus on alcohol awareness in the last two terms of 2011/2012.

Aligning school policies and an emerging collective identity

In the months leading up to the submission of a bid for funds, post primary schools committed themselves to aligning those school policies which linked to the identified common need themes. In so doing the schools committed to developing a set of shared or common school

policies. Participants commented that this allowed schools to develop ‘common strategies’, ‘common language’ or a ‘consistent message’ across both communities:

So the whole town could be dealing with these issues with consistency and that the language we all use is common and the strategies that we are giving them to deal with certain situations are common.

Education Manager: School 3

This proposed level of collaboration not only provides benefits for the individual members, but leads to a degree of success that belongs to the group and can only be achieved by as a result of the actions of the group. The success of this is evident when the discourses and terminology used by the participants moves away from individual goals and practices, to discourses that represents the actions of a collective or a community. In the following transcript extract, the school manager reflects on behalf of the partnership both, a clear sense of collective identity and a sense of common purpose; rather than ‘we’ meaning their own particular school, the manager is referring to the partnership of schools. As a consequence a collective identity has formed:

This is work that needs to be done in all of our schools, with all of our children. If we did this and we got this right we could make a real difference in these children’s lives. We might even save lives. I strongly believe that in this moment in time that there are issues out there that if we don’t tackle head on in school that some of our children in the future are going to lose their lives over it. And from that need in the three schools we were able to see a common programme that could be delivered in the schools that could tackle common issues. It would make a difference in our society, in our communities.

Education Manager: School 2

Partnership Infrastructure

One of the most significant themes to have emerged from the partnership activity was the creation of various elements of a governing infrastructure which represented the out-workings of the partnership. These structures had not operated in the previous, smaller, partnership models and may reflect a maturing of the partnership. Schools opted to create a number of structures to support multi-level partnership activity. The staff involved in the initial planning meetings, largely made up of senior staff and teachers from each post primary school, met quarterly to over-see the programme. Two members of the Sharing Education Programme implementation team were invited to join the partnership, as was a representative of the Local Authority. A representative from the PSNI Community Safety Team was asked to join the partnership to act in a consultative capacity in relation to the need themes - the common focus of the partnership.

Other elements of partnership infrastructure include a finance committee, made of school bursars who periodically met to oversee partnership funding allocation and spending. The partnership also opted to create a Principal’s group, which like the steering group, would meet quarterly to examine the performance and potential of the partnership. All school Principal’s agreed to attend this strategic group.

The last element of partnership infrastructure involves creating a professional network of the post primary teachers involved in delivering shared lessons. This group of teachers is essential to the core of the programme in that they organise transport of the pupils between schools; deliver the shared lessons through co-teaching in each other's schools and meet on a weekly basis to plan events and create shared schemes of work and lesson plans. Two of the teachers from schools 1 and 2 have in the past as part of SEP 1 worked collaboratively to deliver Key Stage 3 Learning for Life and Work and Citizenship. While the professional and personal relationship between both teachers has remained, the dynamics of this group has altered significantly in that a new member from school 3 joined the group and the curricular focus changed in that, the programme activity centred around addressing the five need areas through the curriculum.

Discussion: Demonstrating effective collaboration

The methodology section of this paper introduced literature on what constitutes effective collaboration and proposed a toolkit of sorts, based on a combination of criteria outlined for the most part by Woods et al. (2006) along with others. One of the stated aims of the study was to assess whether, in its first year, the Contested Space Partnership can demonstrate collaborative effectiveness or the potential for collaborative effectiveness. Additionally, the theoretical framework previously discussed adopts a perspective where learning is a social and interactive process. Wenger's concept of communities of practice (1998) is particularly useful to this study because effective models of partnership are more likely to emerge from organisations that have or develop shared interests, as this can lead to the development of shared competencies. The notion of a community of practice is defined by joint activities, mutual support, relationship building and sharing information, while practice is defined by the creation of a 'shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems', (Wenger, 2011: 2). Applying this to schools it is important to look for evidence that collaboration can produce shared knowledge, learning and practice, or as Boreham (2000, 6) suggests 'collective competence.'

Boreham's (2000, 2004) discussion of collective competence has particular resonance here. Boreham (2004, 3) argues that collective competence involves three actions: first, where a partnership is able to articulate a 'collective sense of events' – this involves initially the individual members articulating their own personal story until the partnership is able to construct a collective re-interpretation; second, where the partnership is able to 'develop and use a collective knowledge base' – this involves the partnership creating a common, shared or collective knowledge base which is over and above the knowledge of the individual members; and third, where a partnership needs to develop 'a sense of interdependency.' When schools came together in the spring of 2011 to form a new partnership, discussions around the needs of their pupils represented an example of each articulating their own sense of events and the challenges facing their pupils. This process then helped schools reconstruct a collective sense of events whereby schools came to realise that they shared a collective view about the needs of their pupils. The collective knowledge base then became the needs discourse itself and from this developed curricular strategies and a distinct partnership identity. Collaborative activity in the form of shared lessons, shared parents events, partnership infrastructure, policy alignment, building teacher capacity and making links with community expertise, represent actions which promotes a new type of cooperative interdependence.

Group Identity and Organisational Infrastructure

This study has demonstrated that the participants representing the constituent schools that make up the Contested Space Partnership do appear to have a clear sense of partnership identity, or at the very least are in the process of developing one. Much of this perceived entitativity (Levine and Hogg, 2010; Lickel et al. 2000) appears to derive from the participants' perspectives that they share common goals; through the way they interact within the infrastructure that the partnership has created and through the practice of shared learning. The partnership has established a working steering committee; a Principals committee; a finance committee and a post-primary coordinators forum which meets and plans delivery on a weekly basis.

Key to the notion of collaborative evolution, was that, rather than having to go through the process of establishing a new group identity, the post primary schools appear to have retained elements of group identities that developed in the first cohort of SEP. Arguably the formation of the Contested Space Partnership derives from the common ancestry of the collaborative activity from the first cohort of SEP. Participants described building on, or sustaining, existing partnership arrangements rather than creating an entirely new partnership. Thus, participants did not appear to view the Contested Spaces Partnership as entirely nascent, indeed some participants were explicit in their claim that the Contested Spaces Partnership evolved out of SEP. One example of this was that schools have retained the practice of shared lessons. For the most part, the same staff members involved in SEP1 remained involved in Contested Spaces, thereby helping with continuity and familiarity. This included senior staff, those previously involved in programme co-ordination and crucially the teachers involved in delivering shared lessons. This is not to say that all things remained as before and previous sections of this paper highlight how the current partnership can be thought of as distinct in terms of the way in which a number of partnerships have been consolidated into one; where schools address common need themes; a different curricular focus and the new partnership governance arrangements that have emerged.

Strategic vision and innovation to seek change

Woods et al. (2006) highlighted that an effective model of collaboration is one where a partnership can articulate strategic vision. Hodgson and Spours (2006: 335) describe the notions of vision and underlying principles as the 'glue that binds wider actors together.' The evidence to date suggests that the Contested Space Partnership has been particularly adept at articulating both a common sense of purpose (Head, 2003) and demonstrating joint venture (Nicholls, 1997). Schools have collectively identified a number of need themes and developed a programme of shared learning. The need areas in effect characterise the identity, vision and practice of the partnership. All of this seems to provide the potential for systemic change by recasting the nature of the interdependencies between schools, and hence the educational environment and opportunity they can provide for the young people in the schools. Where the schools in this study demonstrate innovation and evolution, is to take this collaborative context, which they were familiar with under SEP, and adapt the model so that a shared approach is still central to the partnership's activity, but the boundaries of sharing are broadened. The motivation to collaborate becomes a collective response, mediated by a localised context (Higham and Yeomans, 2009), around addressing need and improving the lives of the pupils within the partnership and developing communities.

Penetration and the extent of collaborative activity

The concept of penetration is important as it can be used as a gauge to assess the depth of impact that collaboration has on the schools. It can also be used as a gauge to measure how deeply the partnership's strategic vision has become embedded within the schools. Hargreaves (1992) refers to the idea of 'bounded collaboration', by which he means that the impact of collaboration is constrained and activity is prescriptive, such that it does not penetrate deeply enough into the culture of a school. Bearing this in mind there are multiple ways of thinking about penetration. Collaborative penetration in schools could be shallow and confined to the managerial level. Alternatively penetration could be deep, but narrow or thin. In other words, collaborative activity might penetrate all the way through a school, from management, to teachers, to pupils and even into the community, but this may be limited only to those directly involved in the project. Perhaps at its most extensive, penetration will be deep and wide, such that the impact of collaboration travels down through the school, to all levels, but is osmotic and permeates across the school and community.

A defining characteristic of the programme involves developing communities and improving the lives of young people through a shared education programme; which utilises LLW at KS3 and involves hundreds of young people. The scope of the project, from the outset, is wide and ambitious, and clearly penetrates deeper than activity 'bounded' at the school manager level. Many of the pupils will be engaged in sustained contact through shared lessons over a period of three years. To date, the partnership has provided a number of shared teacher training days at primary and post primary levels. These events have focused on encouraging the participation and involvement of a wider cohort of teachers, beyond those directly and currently involved in delivering shared lessons. In doing so this broadens the reach of partnership activity and ensures that penetration is more osmotic throughout schools. Furthermore the role played by statutory and community groups in schools, such as the PSNI, demonstrate that collaboration penetrates through the school and into the community. In the same way partnership activity extends into the community and reaches parents, from both sides of the contested space, who have been involved in shared activities in each of the post-primary schools.

Normalised collaboration as part of the schools' culture

The actual process and experience of cross-sector collaboration between schools is, in itself, an important outcome. The Contested Space Partnership has secured funds for three years (2011-2014). If the experience of SEP 1 is also factored in, the post-primary schools will have amassed almost seven years of sustained collaborative activity. The experience of collaboration has penetrated into each of the schools cultures becoming a 'new normality.' According to participants, key to normalising collaboration involves ensuring that partnership activity is sustained and regular, rather than ad hoc.

The partnership's commitment to aligning school policies represents a significant step towards normalising collaboration. This means that a shared or common approach to addressing need becomes embedded in each of the school's culture. According to Prosser (1999: 8) a school's unique culture and evidence of its value base are often determined by 'guiding policies' and 'distinctive in-house rules for getting on and getting by'. Therefore by aligning policy, schools in partnership with different ethos, go some way to cementing a common or collective approach to addressing need in the community and, perhaps more important, creating a different type of dynamic in the relationship between the schools and the people in them.

Impact of the partnership

This paper focuses on the initial formation phase of the Contested Space Partnership. Data collection took place over a period of four months between March and June 2011 and thus mainly focuses on the emergent partnership activities between three post primary schools: the primary schools joined the partnership after the data gathering period for this paper, but ongoing work is exploring the evolving nature of the collaboration. Our assessment of the impact of the partnership to date therefore focuses on this the initial formation phase and a number of themes can be seen. First, a unitary partnership has been developed from what had been two, smaller partnerships. The new partnership involves three post primary schools collaborating across the religious divide in a contested space context. In a divided society, with a history of political violence and a continuing legacy of that violence, the ability of these schools to forge a partnership at all is a significant development. Second, the schools were able to agree a common focus upon which to unite partnership activity, namely the five need areas; this has the effect of providing superordinate goals for partnership members. The concept and practice of addressing social need areas through the curriculum, in a cross-sectoral, shared learning context, is unique in Northern Ireland. Personal and professional connections between teachers and senior staff have been created as they engage in a collaborative network based on sharing resources, expertise and programme implementation. An important element of this partnership is the involvement of statutory and community agencies to assist schools to address social issues through the curriculum. The role of the PSNI is particularly significant given the legacy of political division that remains in Northern Ireland. The police have found it difficult to garner trust within nationalist communities and by extension have found it difficult to gain access to Catholic schools as a part of their community policing strategy. More recently, the Catholic Church and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools [CCMS] have, as part of a peace building strategy, developed a strategic partnership with the PSNI, endorsing a programme which encourages Catholic schools to develop links with the police, including access to classrooms. This strategy however, is met with resistance in some predominantly nationalist communities or where there is dissident republican support. Parents and local community representatives have voiced their concerns in national and social media outlets. Parents have concerns that the PSNI will use access to schools as a long term strategy for recruiting Catholics, others argue that poor relationships between the police and the community continue, despite recent police reforms as part of the peace process and as such the PSNI should not have access to what have been described in certain social media sites as neutral learning environments. Therefore given that two of the three schools involved in the partnership are Catholic schools, and are located in communities where there has been opposition to police involvement in schools, the invitation extended to the police to join the steering committee is significant, as was their role in delivering lessons in maintained schools within the partnership.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the paper we provided a timeline that described how schools and education more generally can play an active role as an agent of change, particularly within the context of a society that has come through ethnic conflict. The paper adds to the evidence on the way meaningful collaboration between schools from different sectors help address the legacies of conflict and division that remain. This model may have utility in a number of contexts and has already generated interest in Israel and Macedonia, where legacies of ethnic conflict are also reflected in separate schools for ethnic communities. One example from this partnership lies in the way collaboration allows for a more cohesive engagement with a range of external agencies, including those, such as the police, with which engagement by individual schools may be

problematic. It was possible in this partnership both because of the wider network of schools involved but also because of the strategic objectives upon which collaborative engagement was based: in this respect the clear delineation of a valued superordinate goal appears to have been particularly important.

The Contested Space Partnership has evolved out of the model developed by the Sharing Education Programme. In addition to promoting partnership work, facilitating shared learning and resources, and the promotion of reconciliation through regular and meaningful contact the new partnership has developed an approach in which the schools focus their collaboration around an agreed social needs agenda, and engage with a range of external statutory and non-statutory agencies in addressing this agenda. This needs agenda provides a superordinate goal which addresses the challenges faced by young people and the response to these challenges by schools. In this case the agreed needs agenda focused on sexual health, online safety, substance misuse and anti-social behaviour. On one level this is similar to area-based interventions in other contexts, such as Children's Zones in England (Dyson et al. 2013) or the Promise Neighborhood Initiative in cities such Harlem in New York and Los Angeles (Youth Policy Initiative, 2013). The distinctive feature of the present case is that the collaborative activity and area-based intervention also addresses issues related to ethnic divisions in a divided society. In other words, the intervention is not just designed to address pressing social issues, although it does this, but rather it uses a superordinate goal in order to promote a wider social agenda around mitigating the negative consequences of ethnic divisions, particularly in a context where these divisions are institutionalised through the operation of ethnically distinctive schools.

The paper offers a number of contributions to the research corpus. Firstly it supplements the existing literature on collaborative effectiveness, particularly within an educational context. The partnership, even at this formative stage, when assessed against the proposed analytical toolkit adapted from Woods et al. (2006) and others suggests that it has the potential to develop into a strong model of collaboration: already it is demonstrating a capacity to innovate and articulate strategy, a clear sense of collective identity, a robust infrastructure and is unifying around a set of common goals.

Following Muijs et al. (2010), the paper offers some additional theoretical insights within a constructivist framework. Given that learning, meaning and knowledge formation are socially constructed, the paper discusses how school partnerships are formed, largely as a result of collaborative networks of individuals whose role it is to define partnership activities, generate shared knowledge and create collective and tangible commodities which ultimately are used to encourage positive outcomes. Wenger's (1998; 2011) discussions of a shared repertoire of resources that emerge from collaboration, and similarly Boreham's (2000) notion of collective competency are proving to be a useful frameworks to examine the effectiveness of this partnership. The analysis is already pointing to the value of synergies between elements of constructivist theory and collaborative effectiveness literature. In effect we are arguing that the effectiveness of a partnership can be assessed by how wealthy it is in terms of the collective commodities the partners produce as a consequence of collaborating. Indicators such as professional and personal relationships, partnership infrastructure, common needs and shared resources demonstrate both effectiveness and a strong sense collective cohesion.

In the context of a divided society it is also important to focus on bridging mechanisms: these will always play a role in collaborative partnerships, but when collaboration occurs in divided societies there are additional mechanisms that need to be overcome. This was evident in some prior work on collaboration in Northern Ireland, where the problem of 'silence' on

controversial issues was an issue that had to be addressed in order to promote effective partnership (Gallagher and Carlisle, 2009). More generally, a lesson from the Sharing Education Programme was that building relationships between people was crucial to effective bridging processes as they move people from perceptions of anxiety towards perceptions of trust (Hughes et al, 2013), a theme which evident in the Contested Space Partnership through multiple layered forms of collaboration between the partners.

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Tables:

<i>School</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>School 1</i>	<i>An all-girl Catholic maintained post primary, specialising in science. The school caters for almost 1000 students between the ages of 11-18</i>

<i>School 2</i>	<i>A controlled secondary, which can cater for almost 1000 students between the ages of 11-18. Collaborative activity between both schools involved.</i>
<i>School 3</i>	<i>School 3 is another Catholic maintained all- girls' post primary college and is located within the same city setting as Schools 1 and 2. It caters for over 900 pupils aged 11-18. School 3 specialises in Performing and Visual Arts.</i>

Table 1: School Descriptions